A Quasi-Experimental Study of Gratitude Journaling on Students' Academic Resilience

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the effect of gratitude journaling in increasing students' academic resilience. This quasi-experimental study used a non-randomized pretest-posttest with a control group design. The subjects were 16 students divided into two groups, 8 students in the experimental group and 8 students in the control group. The data collection instrument was questionnaires containing an academic resilience scale and a gratitude questionnaire. Then the data were analyzed using non-parametric statistical analysis with the Mann Whitney U Test and the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The results of this study indicate that there is a significant difference between the experimental group that received the gratitude journaling treatment and the control group without receiving the gratitude journaling treatment ($p = 0.035$). Then, there is a significant difference in the level of academic resilience of the experimental group between before and after the treatment in the form of gratitude journaling ($p = 0.017$). Besides, the effect size score is 52.5%. This shows that gratitude journaling increases the student's academic resilience with a moderate category. This research can fill in the gap in the study of gratitude and academic resilience based on experiments in Indonesia that have never existed before.

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Introduction

The college period is a period when individuals are attending education at colleges, either universities, polytechnics, higher institutions, etc. In this period, students may face new problems that may not have been experienced before. Martunis & Bahri (2016) conducted a study involving college students at a university and found that some dominant problems are included in the heavy category. The subject from Faculty A has some problems such as financial, life, and work conditions (77.69%), psychological personal relationship (63.07%), household and family (66.15%), adjusting to coursework (66.15%), and future and work problems (66.15%). Meanwhile, the subject from Faculty B faces problems of financial, life, and work condition (72.54%), psychological personal relationship (64.11%), household and family (66.15%), adjustment to coursework (63.35%), future and work problems (67.21%). These problems can have a negative impact on students, one of the most common is psychological disorders, that is stress.

Another study by Ambarwati, Pinilih, and Astuti (2017) involving students as subjects found that the stress level of students is classified into mild stress (35.6%), moderate stress (57.4%), and severe stress (6.9%). Stress disorders are also commonly found in students who are doing their thesis. Zakaria (2017) revealed that students who experience stress in doing a thesis are 86.5% in the medium category and 5% in the heavy category. Besides, the

challenges during the lecture period are also influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, namely the existence of a new learning system. The pandemic affects the student's stress level in doing thesis (Susanti et al, 2021). Many challenges causing psychological disorders show that it is important for students to have good academic resilience.

Academic resilience in the context of higher education is the ability to effectively face challenges, difficulties, and pressures in an academic setting (Martin & Marsh, 2006; Rojas, 2015). Academic resilience is believed to be an advantage or one of the assets and a process that is favored and tends to have a positive impact (Wijayanti & Purwaningtyas, 2020). Meanwhile, Utami (2020) defined academic resilience as the ability to achieve good output despite being in difficulty adapting or following academic developments. Academic resilience has four dimensions, namely, self-adjustment, toughness, intelligence to face difficulties, and problem-solving (Hardiansyah et al, 2020).

Active students with high academic resilience will tend to show a positive attitude in dealing with a problem. This is in line with the previous study which states that every individual with good academic resilience will tend to have positive emotions and positive responses (Fitri and Kushendar, 2019). When students have good academic resilience, they will not easily give up, but believe that they will succeed through it all (Harahap et al, 2020). Every resilient individual can learn and adapt to conditions that make them uncomfortable (Connor and Davidson, 2003).

Sembiring (2018) proposed two factors of academic resilience, namely risk factors and protective factors. The risk factors include family poverty, divorce, minorities, discrimination, language difficulties, parents with certain diseases, violence, premature birth, and others (Asih, Isnarto, Sukestiyarno, & Wardono, 2019; Dianthoni, 2018; Hadianti, Nurwati, & Darwis, 2017; Hendar, 2019; Rasmanah, 2020). Meanwhile, the protective factors include self-efficacy, locus of control, cooperation, communication, empathy, problem-solving skills, self-awareness, goals, aspirations, religiosity, goal orientation, personal responsibility, optimism, and internal expectations (Aini & Lestari, 2021; Salim & Fakhrurrozi, 2020; Satyaninrum, 2019; Zanthy, 2018)

The importance of resilience in academics shows the need for training or interventions that to develop students' academic resilience. Researchers have identified 24 character strengths that can help a person live a meaningful and thriving life, which are classified under the categories of wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Of the 24 character strengths, gratitude is the variable that has recently been studied scientifically. As a character strength, gratitude refers to the ability to recognize and appreciate the benefits of others and the desire to reciprocate with positive actions (Emmons, 2007). Besides, gratitude is also a central pillar of most religions, so spiritually gratitude makes people have a greater relationship with God and have more peace and satisfaction (Emmons, 2007).

In 2014, a group of interdisciplinary professionals conducted a study on gratitude and then illustrated and highlighted the importance of gratitude in overall well-being, at work, at school, and in relationships (Wilson, 2016). Moreover, previous studies have examined specifically the importance of gratitude in learning or at school. A correlational study by Utami (2020) illustrates that gratitude has a contribution to the formation of students' academic resilience.

Gratitude-based interventions can be done through many techniques, one of which is gratitude journaling (Seligman et al, 2005). Gratitude journaling is a process of expressing gratitude by identifying and recording things that you are grateful for every day or every week (Seligman et al, 2005). Emmons & McCullough (2013) express that gratitude

journaling can handle maladaptive cognitive aspects to become more positive (adaptive). Therefore, the application of gratitude journaling is appropriate to overcome the resilience in students.

An experimental study on gratitude journaling has been conducted in 2016 by Jane Taylor Wilson. It involved 110 students as subjects and aimed to examine the impact of gratitude practices on focus and resilience in learning. Wilson (2016) warned the subjects including a reminder at the beginning of the week to be grateful before starting class, a reminder at the end of the week to reflect on and write down 3 to 5 good things or things to be grateful for in learning, and a midweek reminder to think about and be grateful to professors or co-workers who help in the learning process. These reminders were sent every 4-5 days for three months. The results show that gratitude can increase students' ability to focus on learning and remain resilient when faced with learning difficulties.

This study has several differences from previous studies so that it provides innovation and novelty values. First, the subject of this study has a different cultural background from previous studies that discussed the same variables (Wilson, 2016). Second, this study specifically explores the gratitude journaling method, while Wilson (2016) uses the practicing gratitude method which consists of several parts, namely the gratitude journal, the gratitude letter, the gratitude conversation, and the state of preparedness. Studies on gratitude and academic resilience in Indonesia examining the effects of non-experiments and the correlation between the two variables are limited so far. Therefore, this experimental study was conducted to fill the gap and as an additional scientific study related to gratitude and academic resilience for future studies, especially in Indonesia. Moreover, the results of an experimental study based on direct (practical) activities of subjects filling out gratitude journaling can show the causal role of these activities. It can be an empirical reference for students in determining strategies to improve their academic resilience so that they can face every difficulty and challenge in academic activities.

Academic resilience and gratitude are two dimensions that are closely related. When individuals have a high sense of gratitude, they will try to look positively at all things. It will indirectly facilitate the individual's ability to deal with any stressors they experience by outlining each condition so that they can be accepted positively and feel able to solve them (Emmons, 2007). It will help them in dealing with all the conditions in the academic world. So, they become more resistant to pressure, challenges, and can overcome academic problems.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of gratitude journaling in increasing students' academic resilience. The two main hypotheses of this study are that there is a significant difference in the level of academic resilience in the group that received the gratitude journaling treatment and the group without the gratitude journaling treatment. Second, there is a significant difference in the level of academic resilience of the experimental group before and after the treatment in the form of gratitude journaling. Thus, it is expected that this study can provide an overview of the influence of gratitude journaling practices on increasing students' academic resilience.

Research Method

This quasi-experimental study used a non-randomized pretest-posttest design with a control group design. This design was used to prove causality by comparing the effect of gratitude journaling on academic resilience in the experimental group and the control group. The description of this design can be seen below.

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          KE    Y1    X    Y2
          ----------------------------------------
          KK    Y1          Y2
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Notes:

KE : Experimental group

KK : Treatment group

X : Treatment (*Gratitude Journaling*)

Y1 : Pre-test, the score of the academic resilience and gratitude scale before the treatment

Y2 : Post-test, the score of the academic resilience and gratitude scale after the treatment

The selection of the participant was by distributing randomly a Google Form for pretest to students at the Islamic University of Indonesia. The determination of the participants used a purposive sampling technique with the criteria of active students aged 17-23 years. The participants in this study were 16 students who were divided into two groups, namely 8 participants in the experimental group and 8 other participants in the control group.

The data were collected using a questionnaire containing scales. It used additional qualitative data in the form of the results of journaling evaluations and participant reflections. The first scale used was the academic resilience scale developed by Hardiansyah, et al (2020) to measure the level of academic resilience of students. The scale was selected due to its good validity and reliability with the Cronbach alpha value of 0.784. It consisted of 27 statement items that measure 4 dimensions, namely self-adjustment in item numbers 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 19, 20, 21; toughness in item number 4, 5, 13, 14, 22, 23; intelligence to face difficulties in item numbers 6, 7, 15, 16, 24, 25; and solving problems in item numbers 8, 9, 17, 18, 26, 27. Of the 27 items, each is a favorable item with a score range from 1 (very unsuitable) to 4 (very appropriate). The higher the score, the higher the level of academic resilience, and vice versa.

The second scale was the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 which was later developed and modified into the Gratitude Questionnaire-11 in Indonesian Context by Grimaldy & Haryanto (2020), to measure the level of gratitude for students in Indonesia. This instrument was used due to its good validity and reliability with the Cronbach alpha value of 0.789. It consisted of 11 statement items that measure 2 dimensions, namely appreciation to the constant experience of life in item numbers 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and the dimension of appreciation towards individuals that take part in my life in item number 1, 2, 3, 10, 11. Of the 11 items, there were 1 unfavorable item and 10 favorable items with a score ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The higher the score, the higher the level of gratitude, and vice versa.

The procedure for the implementation of this study is as follows, 1) Finding participants by distributing questionnaires containing a scale to students at the Islamic University of Indonesia who meet the predetermined criteria. Finally, the researcher got 100 participants. 2) Categorizing academic resilience scores using empirical categorization references. Then it was followed by screening 100 participants and finding a total of 25 people with low-very low academic resilience. The categories of academic resilience levels can be seen below:

Table 1. Categorization of Academic Resilience Levels

Score Range	Category	Frequency
$X < 68.3$	Very low	3 people
$68.3 \leq X < 78.9$	Low	22 people
$78.9 \leq X < 89.4$	Moderate	52 people
$89.4 \leq X < 100.56$	High	22 people
$X > 100.56$	Very high	5 people

3) Requesting participants' consent (signing informed consent) before participating in the study. Of the 25 participants from the screening, only 16 people agreed to participate in this study. 4) Dividing 16 participants into 2 groups, namely 8 people in the control group and 8 other people in the experimental group. This distribution was random. 5) Providing treatment. The treatment procedure used in this study was a modification of the gratitude journaling experimental treatment procedure by Zulfiana (2014) and Emmons & McCullough (2003). This procedure covers 3 sessions, as follows:

a) Session 1, covering the introduction and socialization of research procedures. This session was conducted via a zoom meeting and it was separated between the control and experimental groups. This process was fully assisted by 2 people outside the experimental team, each of them became an instructor in both the control and experimental groups. Instructors were to maintain the validity of this study.

b) Session 2, covering the treatment for one week. The treatment in the experimental group was that participants were instructed to fill out the gratitude journaling in the provided Google Form. Participants were invited to write down at least 5 things they are grateful for about the academic world. Meanwhile, the control group was instructed to fill out an ordinary daily journal (*placebo*) by writing down difficulties/something that made them uncomfortable every day. The process of filling out this journal was carried out routinely every night for one week. The instructor provided a reminder to fill out the journal every day at 19.00 - 22.00 via WhatsApp for the control and experimental groups.

c) Session 3, covering sharing, termination. and evaluation. This session was conducted via a zoom meeting and it was separated between the control and experimental groups. Each participant was asked to share their experiences reflectively regarding journaling activities that had been carried out for 1 week. Then it was followed by the termination session or treatment termination. Finally, participants were asked to fill in the evaluation link and post-test.

This study used a non-parametric statistical analysis because the number of participants was less than 30 people. However, the assumption test was carried out covering the normality test and homogeneity test. Then, the hypothesis test used the Mann-Whitney U Test analysis to compare the scores between the pretest and posttest (gain score) in order to determine the effect of gratitude journaling on academic resilience in the experimental group and the control group. The data analysis process used SPSS 23.0 for windows.

Results and Discussion
Description of Participants
The total number of participants in this study was 16 people, consisting of 4 males and 12 females. Then the participants were divided into 2 groups, namely 8 people in the control group and 8 other people in the experimental group. The description of each participant can be seen in tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Control Group

Subject	Name	Age	Sex
1	KH	17	Male
2	RH	19	Female
3	S	19	Female
4	SA	20	Female
5	ASA	22	Female
6	SPJ	20	Female
7	DS	21	Female

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| 8 | TPJ | 19 | Female |

Table 3. Experimental Group

Subject	Name	Age	Sex
1	AAA	18	Male
2	MA	21	Male
3	DMM	20	Male
4	N	20	Female
5	SQ	19	Female
6	LA	19	Female
7	NMSR	20	Female
8	ANH	21	Female

Based on the table above, in the control group, out of 8 people, only 1 person is male. While in the experimental group, there are 3 males and 5 females. Overall, it can be seen that the age range of participants is 17-22 years.

Assumption Test

Tabel 4. Normality Test

	Kelompok	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			
		Statistic	**df**	**Sig.**	**Notes**
Pre-test	Control	0.386	8	0.001	Not Normal
	Experimental	0.189	8	0.200	Normal
Post-test	Control	0.209	8	0.200	Normal
	Experimental	0.197	8	0.200	Normal

The assumption test is no longer needed if the participants involved in the study are less than 30 people. However, the assumption test in this study was still done to follow the procedure before testing the hypothesis. Based on table 4, the results of the normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov obtained a significance value of the pre-test score for the experimental group and post-test for the control and experimental groups of 0.200 ($p > 0.05$). It shows that the data are normally distributed. Meanwhile, the pre-test score of the control group is not normally distributed because the significance value is $p = 0.001$ ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5. Homogeneity Test

Levene Statistic	Sig.	Notes
1.836	0.197	Homogeneous

Then based on table 5, the results of the homogeneity test using Levene's Test obtained a significance value of $p = 0.197$ ($p > 0.05$) indicating that the data are homogeneous.

Hypothesis Test

Table 6. The Mann Whitney U Test

Academic Resilience Score	Z	Sig 2 tailed	Notes
Pre-test (*Baseline*)	-0.919	0.358	No difference
Post-test (*Gain Score*)	-2.105	0.035	There are differences

Table 6 shows the results of the preliminary baseline test using the Mann-Whitney test on the academic resilience scores of the experimental and groups in which the pretest obtained a score of Z = - 0.919, with a significance value of $p = 0.358$ ($p > 0.05$). It shows that there is no difference between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test. Thus, a different test can be carried out between the 2 groups after the treatment.

The data analysis on the post-test between the experimental group with the gratitude journaling treatment and the control group without any treatment (placebo) obtained the results of Z = -2.105 with a significance value of $p = 0.035$. It shows that there is a difference

between the experimental group and the control group after the treatment. Thus, the first hypothesis proposed in this study is accepted.

Table 7. Difference Test of Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test in the Experimental Group

Z	Sig 2 tailed	Notes
-2.384	0.017	There are differences

Furthermore, based on table 7, the Wilcoxon difference test showed a significance value of p = 0.017 (p < 0.05) meaning that in the experimental group there is a difference in the level of academic resilience before and after the treatment. Thus, the second hypothesis is accepted.

Table 8. Effect Size

Z	-2.105	
N	16	Notes
Effect Size (2)	0.52625	Moderate Effect

Based on table 8, the value obtained is 0.52 or 52.5%. It shows that gratitude journaling affects the increase of the student's academic resilience with the moderate effect category.

Compare Means Test

The compare means test was carried out as an effort to check manipulation on the student's level of academic resilience and gratitude in both the control and the experimental groups before and after the treatment.

Table 9. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of Academic Resilience

	N	M
Pre-test experimental	8	72.2500
Post-test experimental	8	76.7500
Pre-test control	8	75.8750
Post-test control	8	70.2500

Based on table 7, the mean value of the pre-test score is 72.2500 and the post-test mean is 76.7500 for the experimental group. It shows an increase in academic resilience scores in the experimental group before and after treatment. Meanwhile, in the control group, there is no increase in academic resilience scores.

Tabel 10. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of Gratitude

	N	M
Pre-test experimental	8	59.0000
Post-test experimental	8	66.1250
Pre-test control	8	64.0000
Post-test control	8	63.8750

Based on the mean value of the experimental group in table 8, the mean pretest score is 59.0000 and the post-test mean is 66.1250. It shows an increase in the gratitude score in the experimental group before and after the treatment. Meanwhile, there is no increase in the gratitude score in the control group. Thus, both academic resilience and gratitude scores increase simultaneously for participants in the experimental group.

Discussion

Based on the data analysis, the two research hypotheses are accepted. First, this study's results indicate a significant difference in the level of academic resilience in the experimental group with the gratitude journaling treatment and the control group without the treatment. Second, there is a significant difference in the level of academic resilience before and after the treatment. It means that gratitude journaling can increase students' academic resilience. This study contributes to the increasing number of scientific data related to gratitude as a character that positively influences the student's academic resilience.

Besides, the results of additional qualitative data collection in the form of journaling evaluation results and participant reflections support the key findings of this study. Reflection activities and qualitative evaluation for experimental participants were carried out at the end of the meeting. The process was delivered directly in the discussion room and also through the google form. Based on the qualitative data, responses were obtained in the form of comments from participants which were very useful in providing rich details to support the key findings. Comments from the respondents can be seen below:

"Be more grateful, be patient and scheduled too", "It's a new experience for me to include things that need to be grateful for in the smallest academic fields such as focusing on studying, supporting infrastructure, and of course reminding me that I am grateful because God has provided great sustenance", "Of course it makes me think that every activity that has been done should be grateful for", "I am very motivated and can learn what gratitude is", "Benefits for myself, we can teach the meaning of gratitude to others ", "Personally, I just feel relieved", "I am happy because I can expressively express my gratitude because even though it is admitted that every day sometimes I am only grateful for big things, not small things", "Can understand and learn to be grateful for even for the little things", "More self-trained to express yourself, more comfortable because problems are not kept alone", "Writing this daily journal makes me feel more grateful for the little things but it also makes me remember the fun things that day, it makes my heart calmer and happier", "The benefits make my heart calmer and happier, that it turns out that there are still many things I can be grateful for, which I didn't feel before."

Based on those comments, participants feel positive effects and get benefits after the treatment, especially being grateful for all things related to the academic world. This is also in line with Wilson (2016) in which in the results of the qualitative evaluation carried out at the end, Wilson categorizes the responses of respondents into positive and calm attitudes, lessened stress, focus in learning, effort amidst challenges, and appreciation for reminders (Wilson, 2016).

Therefore, the acceptance of the proposed hypothesis and the presence of additional qualitative data certainly support previous studies. In Indonesia, there is a correlational study of gratitude and academic resilience carried out by Utami (2020). It was conducted with a total of 400 students as a subject and found that gratitude contributes to the formation of academic resilience in students. Besides, Wilson (2016) conducted another experimental study in the United States which examined the practice of gratitude towards focus and resilience in learning. It involved 110 students of which 50 of the students were included in the experimental group and the rest in the control group. The results show that gratitude practices such as writing a gratitude journal can increase students' ability to focus on learning and remain resilient when facing challenges and difficulties in learning.

Academic resilience is a skill in dealing with complex situations, rising from adversity, being able to adapt to the demands of the academic environment (Sari & Indrawati (2017). The results of the previous studies to the present also show the important role of academic resilience in education. Based on the findings, students should have a high level of resilience because there are many difficulties and challenges in the educational world that have the potential to cause psychological problems (Ambarwati, Pinilih, and Astuti, 2017; Zakaria, 2017; Susanti et al, 2021). Besides, it also has impacts on negative outcomes (Martin, 2013) and burnout or fatigue (Fiorilli et al, 2020). High academic resilience can be a capital that has a positive impact on academics (Wijayanti & Purwaningtyas, 2020), increase the ability in dealing with challenges, difficulties, and pressures in an academic setting

(Martin & Marsh, 2006), can achieve output (Utami, 2020), tend to have positive emotions and responses in academics (Fitri and Kushendar, 2019), are not easily discouraged (Harahap, Harahap & Harahap, 2020), and are resilient, able to learn and adapt in uncomfortable conditions (Connor and Davidson, 2003).

Therefore, one strategy that can be done to increase the student's academic resilience is through the practice of gratitude in educational settings. It is based on the theory that the importance of gratitude in academics has an impact on resilience (Wilson, 2016) and the theory that gratitude is the ability to recognize and appreciate the benefits of positive action causing people to have a greater relationship with God and have more peace and satisfaction (Emmons, 2007). It is also in line with the additional findings of this study from the qualitative data which showed that the majority of participants expressed that they felt a change in mindset and behavior to be more positive after the treatment.

Based on the discussion above, this study is expected to be beneficial for related parties, ranging from policymakers, practitioners, and even students to improve academic resilience, one of which is through the practice of gratitude journaling. Then, the findings of this study can certainly enrich empirical studies about gratitude journaling and academic resilience in Indonesia. It also provides a reference/guideline for future researchers who will examine the same variables in Indonesia.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the level of academic resilience of the experimental group with the gratitude journaling treatment and the control group without the treatment. Second, there is a significant difference in the level of academic resilience in the experimental group before and after the treatment. Thus, can be concluded that gratitude journaling has a significant effect in increasing students' academic resilience. Therefore, it is important for students to have a gratitude value as one of the characters forming academic resilience so that they can survive in facing every difficulty and challenge during academic activities.

Recommendation

Based on the results of the study, the researcher makes some of the following suggestions for future studies:

1) For higher education institutions, especially educators (lecturers), it is expected that they can try to implement gratitude journaling into the learning process in the classroom so that students can apply and be trained to do gratitude journaling to provide a positive impact, especially in shaping students' resilience in the academic world.

2) For future studies, first it is expected that the control and validity of the study can be further tightened, one of which is by differentiating the order of questions in the pre-test and post-test and carrying out various manipulation checks. Second, research can be carried out offline, so that the monitoring and evaluation process can be carried out directly. Third, it is necessary to evaluate the understanding of research procedures before giving the treatment to ensure that participants understand the instructions given. Fourth, giving a treatment can be done in a longer period so that changes in participants may have a long-term impact.

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